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ADVANCED RESEARCH IN EDUCATION -- A RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION PROCEDURE DESIGNED AND IMPLEMENTED BY STUDENT ASSOCIATES AND FACULTY MENTORS

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At The University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK), a program funded by the National Institutes of Education (NIE) completed its first year in July, 1980. With a primary purpose of advancing the research activities of women and minorities in education, the program involved Student Associates (doctoral candidates), Field Associates (post-doctoral professionals in education), Faculty Associates (faculty with rank of assistant professor who were initiating their own research projects), and Faculty Mentors (associate professors or professors with acknowledged research competence). A unique feature of the UTK project was the major function of Student Associates in assisting the Project Director (also a Faculty Mentor) with grant management.

Continuation was authorized for the UTK project for the 1980-81 year. In their roles as co-managers of the project, the Project Director and Student Associates designed and implemented a recruitment/selection procedure for the 1980-81 Student Associates. Basic steps in the procedure and instruments developed for application and evaluation of candidates are presented in this report. A concluding section outlines strengths and weaknesses in the recruitment/selection procedure.

Steps in Recruitment/Selection Procedure

In preparation for continuation of the Project, a procedure was designed for selection of Student Associates for 1980-81. Student Associates assumed responsibility for designing a brochure (attached) and application form and for contacting departments in the Colleges of Liberal Arts, Business Administration, Home Economics, and Education to explain the Project

and application procedure. In designing the application form, sample forms that are used for admissions and fellowships or scholarships in various departments in the university were reviewed. In addition, the Student Associate who drafted the questionnaire considered 1979-80 NIE students and their strengths that were especially important in capitalizing on grant opportunities (e.g., writing skills). The Project Director and other Student Associates were asked to critique the application form before distribution. The project and application procedure were explained to department heads, who then distributed the information to potential applicants. In addition to the application form, applicants were asked to submit sample papers which they considered to be good examples of the quality of their writing. Student Associates and Faculty Mentors were asked to review credentials of each applicant. There were 22 applications representing the following departments: Educational Administration and Supervision; Health, Education, and Safety; Industrial and Organizational Psychology; Educational Psychology; Child and Family Studies; and Nutrition and Food Sciences.

Three interview sessions were held to enable Student Associates, the Project Director, and Faculty Mentors to interview the applicants. The following list of questions was used to provide consistency and structure in the interview:

1. Would you be able to commit 20 hours per week to endeavors associated with the NIE Project during the next year? Briefly describe your probable course loads and any other employment in which you are likely to engage.
2. What role will <u>research</u> play in the professional career you have planned for yourself?

3. What sort of assistance would be of most help to you in carrying out any research which you may have planned for the coming year?
4. How would participation in the NIE Project assist you in attaining your personal/professional goals?

Interview questions were derived from the students' personal goals in relation to the demands and goals of the Project. Use of these questions fulfilled two purposes; students learned about the demands and goals of the Project, and interviewers became aware of the students' goals. The first question was asked while a group of interviewees were still together. The other three questions were asked of each applicant in a private interview setting while the rest of the applicants waited outside the interview room. Applicants were invited to submit additional comments in writing after the interview session if there were things that they thought about after their interview was completed. During the interviews, applicants were encouraged to ask questions about the Project. Following the interview sessions ten finalists were selected by the Student Associates and the Project Director, using an evaluation form.

The evaluation form that was used to rate applicants and to select the ten finalists was developed by the Project Director after looking at applications for doctoral study from the College of Education and the College of Home Economics in relation to Project goals. Student Associates reviewed the form and suggested minor revisions. Knowing that all candidates would be highly qualified, an attempt was made to spread ratings at the high end of a continuum. (See Figure 1.)

Based on Review of Applicants' File:	(5) Truly Exceptional	(4) Well Above Average	(3) Good	(2) Average	(1) Below Average	No Opportunity To Observe
Previous work experience related to Project goals						

Figure 1. Evaluation Scale - Sample Item

The form included sections for evaluation of the applicant based on the applicant's file, the interview, and conversations with reference persons. An overall rating, using the same scale but doubling the weight of each score, was based on two items -- potential for the Project to assist in candidate's development and potential for candidate to assist in furthering Project goals. Space was allowed for comments and/or questions at the bottom of the form.

This evaluation form proved to be both helpful and a source of frustration for persons involved in selection of the candidates. When raters tried to give overall scores, a basic question that cuts across all women/minority projects had to be addressed. This question concerned whether the purpose of the Project should be to accept highly qualified candidates and develop them into "stars," or to help persons with unrealized potential to develop into novice researchers. Because of disagreement among the raters, the overall ratings probably were a compromise between these two interpretations of the purpose of the Project. The discussion and soul-searching brought about by the question, however, was viewed by the evaluation group as a worthwhile experience toward strengthening the work of the team. Another disadvantage in arriving at final ratings was that the initial intention was to rate all candidates in comparison to all others. It really was not possible, however, to use other candidates as a standard when the entire group was not interviewed at the same time. While an attempt was made by some raters to reserve judgment until all candidates had been interviewed, the passage of time between the first and last interviews and the difficulty in trying to recall first impressions of persons who were interviewed first hindered the objectivity of raters.

Final tabulation of the ratings was done by individual raters. It was surprising that not all raters interpreted instructions for conversion of scales in the same way. Probably it would have been more efficient to have collected forms untabulated and to have had scores converted by persons responsible for final tabulation.

Faculty Mentors met with the Project Director to make the final selection of new Student Associates after consideration of individual differences among the ten finalists and consultation with references. Five students were selected to receive fellowships for 1980-81, two from the Child and Family Studies Department in the College of Home Economics and three from the Educational Administration and Supervision Department in the College of Education.

Strengths and Constraints of the Recruitment/Selection Procedure

Following the selection of Student Associates for 1980-81, the Project Director and Student Associates for 1979-80 identified strengths and constraints in the recruitment/selection procedure. The purpose of identifying strengths and constraints serves two purposes: to provide a basis for strengthening the Project's recruitment/selection procedure for 1981-82 and to disseminate to others involved in Project management the positive and negative outcomes that can occur in recruitment/selection. Included in this section is a delineation of these strengths and constraints and a discussion section which contains suggestions for remedying constraints.

Strengths

. An outcome of the trans-college recruitment/dissemination procedure was

receipt of applications from a mixture of males, females, and minorities. Project information did, in fact, reach many persons on campus.

- The group interviews allowed candidates in each group to get to know each other and to become acquainted with Project members.
- Project members were forced to address the issue of the purpose of the Project. This process helped Project members and applicants in ascertaining congruence between Project goals and candidates' personal/professional abilities and goals.
- In terms of time usage of Project members and candidates, the process was efficient.
- The procedure was reliable inasmuch as application and interview requirements were consistent for all applicants; all applicants were rated using a standardized evaluation form; and the Project Director asked all applicants the same questions during the interview.

Constraints

- Multiple interviewers may have been threatening to interviewees during the interview sessions.
- References of applicants were not fully utilized.
- Evaluators were frustrated by the necessity to rate their own peers/friends because of the difficulty in rating them objectively.
- Time did not permit taking the final step in establishing a reliable selection procedure which would have involved all evaluators discussing the rating procedures on the evaluation form and participating in a sample rating exercise. Since this last step was not taken, inter-rater reliability was questionable in that the evaluation response

scale was interpreted differently by different evaluators.

. Some Project participants questioned the ability of (1) students outside the College of Education to benefit from the Project, and (2) the Project to benefit from these students.

Discussion

After delineating constraints of the Project's recruitment/selection procedure, the Project Director and Student Associates made the following suggestions for rectifying the constraints:

. Although multiple interviwers may have been threatening to some of the interviewees, the Project Director and Student Associates felt that the involvement of everyone in the interview process was a strength in terms of sharing different points of view pertinent to applicant selection. Therefore, the suggestion was made that all Project participants need to be present during the 1981-82 interviews.

. References of applicants were not utilized fully. However, because at least two evaluators knew each applicant, it was felt that the evaluators themselves were qualified to serve as references. During the recruitment/selection procedure for 1981-82, evaluators will contact references prior to the selection of Student Associates.

. In order to evaluate peers/friends in a more objective manner, Project participants need to have preparatory evaluation sessions in order to identify pertinent traits rather than the overall person. Each applicant will be rated on <u>each</u> trait in comparison with all other applicants. Other suggestions for remedying this constraint include: opting to disqualify self as an evaluator of personal friends or opting to serve only as a reference.

. Inter-rater reliability is a prerequisite to the establishment of a reliable selection procedure. In order to remedy inter-rater disagreement, suggestions were made to discuss the evaluation response scale and to practice evaluating in a simulated role play.

Topics for Discussion

1. How does one establish a congruence between the Project's goals and the applicant's goals and abilities? Should the applicant who has many research experiences/skills be given priority over the applicant who has few research experiences/skills?

2. How can students outside the College of Education benefit from the Project and how can the Project benefit from these students? What are the pros and cons of choosing students in the College of Education as opposed to students outside the College of Education?